

The Best and Brightest Come Back Home:  
The Impact of the Erasmus Mundus Programme  
on its Non-European Master's Graduates

Editor:  
Katarzyna Hadaś

Research and review project team:

Marcin Aziukiewicz  
José Luis Bernal Agudo  
Marta Ramo Garzarán  
Justyna Hadaś  
Annette Lang  
Urszula Wittchen

Photo Editor:  
Jakub Wittchen

This book was supported by the European Commission within the  
“European Higher Education for the World 2 – Studies on international  
students’ mobility and brain gain” project  
under Erasmus Mundus Action 4



Poznań 2009



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## Introduction

Erasmus Mundus is a co-operation and mobility programme in the field of higher education which promotes the European Union as a worldwide centre of excellence in science and teaching. The programme supports high-quality European master's degree courses and provides EU-funded scholarships for nationals from non-European countries to study on these courses. Between 2004 and 2008 around six thousand students from all over the world were awarded Erasmus Mundus scholarships. The Erasmus Mundus Master's Courses they completed at Europe's most prestigious academic institutions gave them high-quality education and practical training. Many of the Mundus alumni have now returned to their home countries, taking with them the knowledge and skills that they gained in Europe.

This book presents the stories of seven Erasmus Mundus alumni, detailing their backgrounds, their experiences of both the programme and of Europe, and their personal and professional development after they returned home. Our "Mundificent heroes" were selected on the basis of an essay competition entitled "*Returning to my home country. My post-Mundus Career.*" The winners were three alumni from Asia, three from Latin America and one from Africa, representing seven different Erasmus Mundus Master's Courses. All of them chose to return home after their graduation. Their stories presented in this book show them working and applying the knowledge they gained in Europe in various areas and professions, all of which are vital for the development of their countries: bioethics in medical practice (Evelyn), hydropower construction engineering (Vivek), research into child language disorders (Harwintha), tropical medicine and health care policy (Rashid), adapted physical activity for handicapped people (Luciana), agriculture and rural development (Mario) and ICT and GIS technologies (Laura).

One of the many problems suffered by developing countries is that of "brain drain" - the loss of highly-skilled professionals to foreign countries which offer better salaries and conditions. However, the offer of higher education in Europe under the Erasmus Mundus Programme does not significantly contribute to this, even though many of the Mundus alumni choose to stay in Europe for some time after their graduation in order to get a job or continue their studies at PhD level. An extended stay in Europe means that they have extra time to develop their expertise, accumulate more skills and experience of Western practices and increase their network of contacts, all of which can be of great benefit to the future development of their countries. When Mundus alumni do decide to stay in Europe, it is usually as a result of a distinct lack of opportunities in their home countries to put their skills into practice at that time. Of the others that do go home directly after their studies, their reasons for doing so are usually a desire to be reunited with their family and friends, a need to return to their previous roles and positions and, most importantly in terms of the programme, a wish to introduce to their home countries the knowledge and skills that they have acquired in Europe. All of these situations are found in the story of the "Mundificent Seven".

The project team visited each of the "Mundus heroes" home countries in order to interview them, research their stories and get footage for the accompanying film. The Seven told us why they had returned, despite the temptation of higher salaries and standards of living in Europe, and how they had found jobs and then introduced the knowledge and skills that they had acquired into their workplaces. They also told us about how they now share and promote European culture and values, and how their studies abroad came to be a path to greater social responsibility, not simply to the advancement of their individual careers.

The story of the seven alumni documents their variety of motives for studying on the Erasmus Mundus programme, their diversity of experiences both in Europe and on returning home, and their range of different plans for further personal and professional development. Their individual stories include times of doubt, disappointment and difficulty, but each of them proves the potential of the Mundus programme to have a positive impact on developing and newly-industrialised countries through the work of its alumni. In some cases, the graduate's return resulted in major developments in their field of expertise in their country, while those of others resulted in smaller improvements or an increased level of professionalism. Regardless of their magnitude, these developments were all possible thanks to a transfer of knowledge and skills from Europe. This book reports the changes not only in the lives of the seven Erasmus Mundus Master's Courses alumni but also in their local environments and communities. Apart from the stories of the graduates themselves, the reader will also find the testimonies of other professionals, either bosses, colleagues, relatives or friends of the Seven, who had been educated or had practised in Europe at some stage of their lives, and whose return had been a "brain gain" for their home countries.

This book is accompanied by the documentary film "*The Mundificent Seven*". Both of these were produced within the framework of the Erasmus Mundus Action 4 project entitled "*European Higher Education for the World 2 – Studies on international students' mobility and brain gain*" in cooperation with Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, Leibniz University in Hannover, Germany and the University of Zaragoza in Spain.

The stories of Mario, Evelyn, Vivek, Laura, Luca, Harwintha and Rashid are well worth getting to know, as they are seven people with remarkable personalities and rich life histories. From their own testimonies, as well as those of significant people from their personal and professional lives, the reader can see the context of their actions, and get a glimpse of countries they live in, where so much still has to be done, and where our "Mundificent heroes" have taken up the challenge to do it. In publishing this book, the project team would like to send the message to anyone interested in the Erasmus Mundus programme and in European higher education that by choosing to study in the European Union individuals from all over the world can significantly contribute to the development of their home countries, to the great benefit of their people. And in doing this, they can also succeed personally, just like the Mundificent Seven...